

**MEETING SUMMARY #5  
WSF COMMUNITY MEETING  
KITSAP CONFERENCE CENTER, BREMERTON, WA  
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2009 6:30 – 8:30 P.M.**

*Note: This meeting summary represents notes from the Washington State Department of Transportation Ferries Division (WSF) Community Meeting, and is not a formal transcript or minutes. It is provided as a record for the staff and public in attendance, and other interested parties.*

**Welcome and Introductions**

WSDOT Assistant Secretary David H. Moseley

David welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming. He introduced his WSF staff members as well as the new Ferry Advisory Committee (FAC) chair Ann Erikson and the other FAC members who were in attendance, then briefly went over the agenda and noted that there would be time for public comment at the end of the meeting.

**Route & Community Specific Issues**

WSDOT Assistant Secretary David H. Moseley, WSF Planning Director Ray Deardorf

David apologized for the service disruption caused by the removal of the Tacoma from service last Thursday morning. Crews needed to perform repairs to the vessel's steering system. Bremerton and Bainbridge were both affected; by midmorning on Friday both routes were restored to full service.

**Clarifying Questions from Audience**

1. Why is it that you have to juggle our schedule like that, why not take a boat from Kingston? It's always a nightmare when this happens.  
*It's true that these disruptions cause a lot of issues; we don't have a backup boat and we need to share the pain. We probably haven't done that as much as we need to. If it's only going to be for a short period we shouldn't move boats around like that.*
2. I lived on Vashon years ago and whenever we went from three boats down to two we knew what to do. It's frustrating here to the point where I've looked at selling my house, because every time Bainbridge has a problem I have to lose a day of work. If we knew what to expect then maybe it would be different.  
*We do have an emergency one-boat schedule. For this particular disruption we were not able to bring in the passenger-only boat.*

- You have a schedule but you don't follow it. It seems that there's constant unpredictability with the Bremerton route. If you need to pull a boat you need to, I understand. It seems like if you live on Bainbridge or Vashon you know it will be filled, but Bremerton is so unpredictable you never know. It's different every time. Last time we were down when the boat hit the pier, it was a long time before you published the schedule.
- We send out ferry alerts to people who are signed up.*
- I should be able to see it on your website within hours not days.
- You have a very valid point and we will look at that.*
3. I've asked you in the past about your weekly ferry alerts. I felt that they were too cryptic; they had no real explanation. It would help if they gave us more of a feeling of what's going on, have you started doing that?  
*Yes, I have had some conversations with our Communications people. That is another thing that we need to do to be consistent. Point well made.*
  4. The last incident wasn't all that bad. I was trying to get to the 9 o'clock boat and my Blackberry told me there would be no ferry, so I went to Starbucks and was able to get some work done and alert my employer that I would be late. It was enough information that I could react. We would like to see that if you know the night before that you're not going to meet your schedule. How long does it take to get the Victoria Clipper?  
*24 hours.*  
Maybe you could get that shortened or bite the bullet and say that you won't move the boat until you can.
  5. Bainbridge has two newer boats and we have two older boats. What about alternating one of the newer boats out for Bremerton. Maybe it won't break down as much and even make the run faster; that would solve some of the problems right there.  
*The Bremerton boats don't actually break down more than the other boats; the last time one of yours was down was when it hit the pier. It's usually been us taking a boat off of Bremerton because of boats going down on other runs. We know we owe it to Bremerton that if it's going to be a 24-48 hour disruption, we should leave it the way it is and not try to juggle the boats.*
  6. We know we're at greater risk with these older boats of having them break down. In general you do less disservice to your crews by shuffling them around as well.  
*If it will take about 24 hours to get the passenger-only boat here as a standard, we should make it a general rule not to take away a boat during that 24 hours.*
  7. In September, the issue with the foot ferries, we waited for hours and I ended up not being able to make it to work. I lost a whole day's wage.

The 24 hour rule would help. If one of our boats was down I could understand, but every time something happens at Bainbridge we lose our boat; it's not fair. We don't have an alternative; I feel picked upon as a Bremerton resident.

8. It seems like there are two issues. The first is equity from route to route. The second is transparency. Are there rules or is it a crapshoot? Articulated rules might give people a sense of how to address those concerns.

*We will look at ways to make that clearer.*

9. There are also delays caused by crewing issues. The 24 hour thing sounds good.

10. The Victoria Clipper works well when it can get there. Can you get into a contract with them where we could pay more to accelerate movement of the boat here, like maybe 12 hour notice instead of 24?

*Sometimes they can do it that fast and sometimes they can't.*

What about a contract?

*I don't know; we can explore that.*

11. It sounds like you're going the right direction for the short term fix; spread the pain a little bit. What can we do to help you with the long term fix since we don't have a backup boat?

*I toyed with the idea of bringing the Hiyu here.*

Why didn't you?

*Well it would make the ride from Seattle to Bremerton an hour and a half long and blown the schedule out of the water. However, it would have sent the message that I'm giving you the only boat I've got. It would have been even more problematic though, so we decided against it.*

You made the right choice; it's so small and slow that it would have been worthless.

*To answer your other question about the long term fix, the reality is that we don't have a dedicated capital fund.*

We need a staged fund.

*No, we need a dedicated capital funding source or all we have is a wish list.*

The Legislature seems to approve things in pieces, from an outsider's perspective. Can we get a certain percentage of taxes to go toward the marine highway system instead of spending money on light rail and fixing potholes that we don't need to? How do we get them to see that the ferries aren't getting their appropriate share?

*You don't want your appropriate share. We carry less than 1% of the people on the highway, and we get more than 12% of the budget.*

Light rail gets about half.

*That's a totally different funding source.*

12. When people say that they are getting so frustrated that they are calling their realtors, it makes me think we're throwing money away from Kitsap because we can't provide a reliable way off the peninsula. People don't want to be here if they can't get off when they want to; we're killing ourselves.  
*We need to get that funding source and build more boats.*
13. Rather than just depending on the email alerts, if you could feed a couple of phrases to the television media it would help. I don't log on in the mornings but I do watch the news.
14. In terms of addressing the public in emergencies, can we get on a phone list or receive a text message?  
*Our alerts go out to email and text if you are signed up.*
15. What would it cost to purchase a boat like the Victoria Clipper so we could have it as a permanent backup in case of mechanical failures?  
*It would cost money we don't have. I'm guessing somewhere around 3-4 million.*
16. People that live in Bremerton are practical; we know we need to share at times. Have you ever considered actually physically sharing the boat, like having the same boat stop at both places?  
*We have done that in the past, it's a very long ride.*  
When people are in that much need even one run would help.
17. Have you thought about competing with the private passenger-only ferry service?  
*We tried that and we couldn't make it even with a subsidy. Our auto-ferry fare box recovery is around 70% of our operating cost which is very high; our passenger-only service was down to 15-20%. Transportation is a subsidized government service; it's not something that can pay for itself at prices people can afford. BC Ferries is private and it is much more expensive.*
18. I have some information about how BC Ferries cut their operating costs; you should take a look at how they made their cuts. I have the article, it's very good.  
*They cut about 70 administrative support positions and we have cut 30, which is proportionately more because they have many more employees than we do. We've also reduced our consulting cost by 70%. We're always looking for efficiencies.*

Ray discussed two more route specific issues: a legislative proviso and the upcoming winter schedule. Last spring a legislative proviso directed us to analyze the possibility of enhanced service on the Seattle / Bremerton run. The specific items that we looked at were solving the midday gap in service, and improving crossing time. At the same time that we were starting to look at the

midday gap, we were engaged in conversations with our crews' bargaining units about shift arrangements in response to the loss of our touring watches. Touring watches involved crew members working 8 hours then sleeping on the boat for 8 hours, and then working another 8 hours before getting off. This amounted to working 16 hours in a 24 hour period, which the Coast Guard directed us to put an end to. One of the ways we mitigated the loss of those watches was to negotiate 10 hour shifts at straight time with our bargaining units. We didn't have any touring watches on the Bremerton run, but the result of the negotiations was the flexibility to change to 10 hour days instead of 8 hour days. This gave us an opportunity to look at the Bremerton schedule in a different way. When we applied the 10 hour shifts to Bremerton, we had to reposition a boat to be on the right side of the sound at the end of the crew day. The only time was during that midday gap, so we were able to correct that problem at the same time.

The other aspect of the proviso that we looked at was the issue of crossing time. We heard the desire to make the crossing 45 minutes long rather than the current 55-60 minutes. The Super Class vessels were capable of crossing at that speed when they were new, 42 years ago; they can't handle the faster speeds like they used to. The state slowed them down in 1973 when the first oil embargo happened; the fuel burn rate at 20 knots is astronomical. Recently we have investigated how fuel consumption changes at different speeds. Some of our vessels, like the Kitsap, don't have much of a difference so it doesn't save much fuel by slowing them down. The other two boats on this route have a noticeable difference in fuel use at faster speeds. Our conclusion was that it would not be feasible from a cost standpoint even if it were mechanically possible to speed up the boats.

Going to the winter schedule, we had to plug in two additional trips in the afternoon in midstream of the schedule period. We were unable to do it in time to print the fall schedule. It was a little compressed and we have talked with the FAC about ways to possibly improve on that schedule. We came up with the plan to move mid to late morning sailings and some early afternoon sailings a little earlier than they are now, leaving the commuter times the same. This gives the boats the time they need to make the crossing. We don't have the midday gap anymore, and we moved one Sunday sailing from 11:45 to 11:10 to help the people going to Seahawks games. Our idea is to try this new schedule for awhile and then take another look at it down the road to see how it's been working.

### **Clarifying Questions from Audience**

1. I really enjoy having that midday boat. If I only want to have a partial day in the city, I can come back and not have to spend the whole day over

- there. It connects Bremerton better than having that huge gap; it's really wonderful.
2. Do the Bainbridge boats run at full capacity at night?  
*None of our boats run full at night.*  
Can we share one boat with them at night?  
*We have done that in the past, the 2:40 am from Seattle. It got in to Bremerton around dawn.*
  3. I heard a compliment on the midday run from someone coming back from visiting their sick niece in the hospital in Seattle. They were happily surprised that the sailing existed and were able to get home earlier; they really appreciated it.
  4. In terms of the schedule, do we have to choose between a midday ferry and a late night ferry? Is it either-or, or can we have both?  
*Adding service adds fuel and crewing costs, which doesn't work well with our budget situation. We want to let this schedule settle in and we can revisit it later. It might be either-or. We don't know yet.*  
Instead of adding a later boat can we move the 10:30 back to 10:45?  
*We might be able to do that.*
  5. What if we just add a later ferry on Friday and Saturday nights? It would make it easier to make plans to go out on those evenings in the city.  
*We will take a look at that when we have these conversations about the schedule down the road.*

### **New Vessel Program**

WSDOT Assistant Secretary David H. Moseley

David discussed the construction of the new ferry at Todd Shipyard. We are currently undergoing construction of the first 64-car ferry. The project is on time and on budget; it is looking like a boat at this point rather than a bunch of pieces of steel. We have monthly meetings with Todd Shipyard which are very informative. It will be completed by the end of June next year, and then there will be testing and sea trials for 4-6 weeks. We expect the new vessel to be in service on the Port Townsend / Keystone run in August of 2010. This is our first new boat in 10-12 years and we are very pleased. We recently had a bid opening for 2 more 64-car ferries with an option for a third. The bid came in much better than the first bid, so even though there was only one bidder again, there was still a significant savings. We issued the Notice to Proceed last week, from which point Todd has 540 days to complete the 2<sup>nd</sup> boat. They may beat that milestone by a couple of weeks because the engineering work is the same. Then the 3<sup>rd</sup> boat is due to be complete in January of 2012; that boat will replace the Rhody on the Point Defiance / Tahlequah route. Our next step is to start

building 144-car boats. We would like to go right into building the larger boats rather than a fourth 64-car boat.

### **Clarifying Questions from Audience**

1. Does the state option to build a 144-car boat expire?  
*That option expires in May of 2011. After the Legislative session we will know if there are sufficient funds to proceed with building a 144-car boat. If not we will take the option of the fourth 64-car boat, but I believe we need the two 144s.*
2. I would like to really encourage the design of the passenger area to be more like the Super Class vessels rather than the Walla Walla. It's really far superior, and the walk-on element is important for Bremerton.

### **Vehicle Reservations Pre-Design Study**

WSDOT Assistant Secretary David H. Moseley, WSF Operations and Project Manager Doug Schlieff

David introduced Doug as the project manager for the study. Doug has been with WSF for more than 30 years and is a daily ferry commuter. He brings a lot of knowledge to the table. We wanted someone involved in this study that uses the ferries everyday and can ask the question: how would that work for me? Before I hand it over to Doug I want to clarify what exactly the Legislature has directed us to do. They have directed us to conduct a pre-design study of what a reservations system would look like. What would the IT / back office technology have to be to serve the needs of our customers? What business rules would need to be in place to make the system work well and be flexible? I want to be clear - the Legislature has not authorized us to implement reservations anywhere. They want to see the pre-design report to understand how reservations would work, and to make sure that it would be helpful to customers rather than an inconvenience. This is only worth doing if it can help our customers as well as help us spread our demand better.

Doug continued the discussion by explaining some of the reasons for reservations. Most have heard about the steel electrics being pulled from service. That event combined with the fact that our entire fleet is aging has led to all of the funding being directed toward building new boats. There is no funding for terminal expansion. There are congestion issues at our terminals, and because of the financial situation that the state is in we have had to identify some strategies that will allow us to better use the space that we have without expanding any of our facilities. A reservation system may be one way to mitigate some of the demand, reduce wait times, and cut down on the amount of vehicles idling at the tollbooths. It was identified in our Long Range Plan and the

Legislature directed us to take a closer look at this possibility. If we were able to take the line at the tollbooth and turn it into a list of reserved cars, we could try to push the demand out to underutilized trips. If we are able to provide our customers with certainty about the boat they will be able to get on, so they can just come down and get on the boat, we may be able to attract more users by offering that service. By doing this we are trying to avoid having to expand our existing terminals.

The Legislature wants to know how this would work, what terminal processing enhancements we would need, the costs/benefits/risks, and the IT back office needs. As we go through the pre-design study, our first goal is to not limit our users' abilities to travel. Also, the system has to be easy to use and flexible. We want to improve our ferry communities' environments and mitigate expensive terminal construction. We sent out a Request for Information to the industry to determine what types of reservation programs are available off the shelf. We received six responses that were very useful, and helped us to see some features that our customers might like. We also contacted more than a dozen ferry systems around the world that use reservations, including some in England and Istanbul, Turkey. I personally visited BC Ferries, which has a very successful reservations system. There are many similarities between our system and these other systems, but also many differences. We have benefited from learning about what has worked and not worked for these other systems.

We have also split up into work groups to pursue a variety of topics, one of which is the business rules that would need to be in place to accomplish our goals. We need these rules to be able to spread our demand better, but also to protect all of our different types of users. We needed to apply this study to a specific route, and we chose Edmonds / Kingston, which has turned out to be a great choice. It is a challenging route, which has all the different user types and also carries the most cars in our entire system. We formed a partnership group in July made up of a variety of users from both sides of that route, and we have been meeting to discuss the proposed system. They have been very constructive, asking lots of great questions, and we appreciate the time they have put in.

Next we are expected to present the draft pre-design report to the Legislature on December 15<sup>th</sup>. We have two more partnership meetings before then and lots of work to do. It is a huge task to bring together all of what we have learned. We envision that after the document is finalized, every route will be slightly different, and the pre-design report won't cover every characteristic of every route. We don't know what the future holds, we don't know if this will be implemented on some routes and not others; it may not be a one size fits all system.

### Clarifying Questions from Audience

1. Reservations won't work if people can't get to the dock.  
*That's what we have been asked to look at; can this work.*
2. Will this report come with a recommendation from you or just the analysis?  
*Part of the pre-design report includes suggestions for alternatives to reservations, as well as our recommendation, but it's meant to be an open ended document.*
3. It sounds like you don't anticipate this being a one-size-fits-all type of system.  
*That is absolutely correct. Each route is different and will be looked at separately.*
4. I was on the Croatian ferry system last year and it was amazing to me to see how simple it was.  
*Did they have a reservation system?*  
I was not aware of one. Many of the boats went from touristy areas to the outer islands, but there were local commuters as well so both types of the population used the system; it was so easy.
5. It sounds expensive to implement a reservation system. It seems like a better fix would be a system where you reward people for not taking up car space.  
*We do that now; we have priority access for vanpools and carpools.*
6. I'm hearing angst about the cost side. I'm curious if we can save money by being able to borrow an existing system rather than building something new.  
*We will not have to reinvent the wheel with this system. There are some very robust systems out there supported by vendors; we may need to tweak some elements to fit our unique needs but we won't have to build this from scratch.*
7. One of the issues with Kingston is that WSF doesn't own the dock, the Port of Kingston does; you cannot expand. People can't get through on Sundays because of traffic backups. Unless you widen the road you won't be able to give priority access to people with reservations.  
*There is no question that we will have to set it up in a way that if you have a reservation you go straight to the tollbooth. If you don't, you have to wait.*  
In Mukilteo you doubled the holding lanes and all it did was create more problems.  
*We realize there is a congestion issue at the intersection.*  
People didn't know that there was a whole extra boat's worth of cars in the holding lanes on the dock. It was deceiving, they saw that the line looked shorter up the road and they got in line thinking the wait was less than it actually was.



*One aspect of a successful reservation system is that the backup wouldn't be there. If it's working properly most people won't come to the dock if they don't have a reservation.*

This encourages people to be on the phone while they're driving. I don't know why you think this will discourage people from coming to the dock, people will still come down.

*I ask that you keep an open mind and read the study when it comes out.*

*These are all issues that we've looked at. If we can't resolve an issue we will tell the Legislature. Also, the South Hampton ferry terminal in England looks exactly like Mukilteo, with a busy main street running alongside it.*

*You can go on Google Earth and look at their setup and see how similar it is to us. It worked for them; why not us?*

The most positive sounding thing is for the oversized and tall vehicles, clearing the way for them with reservations will work.

*They have been involved in our Edmonds / Kingston partnership group and we have received a lot of great information from them.*

8. I want to say that I was at the Kingston meeting, and they will not let them do anything that won't work.

*That's the truth; it's a great group, very vocal. They won't let anything happen without a fight.*

9. Have these other systems always had reservations? And if not, how long was the learning curve for them?

*Some systems have had reservations for over 40 years. The Istanbul, Turkey system was more recent. The Nantucket system has been in place for over 50 years.*

10. What will the booking capacity be? How far beyond 100% will you go?

You will have no-shows, so will you do like 120%?

*We won't ever reserve 100% of the boat; we have to leave some room for standby cars, vanpools/carpools, and emergency vehicles. We want to avoid no-shows by having people buy their tickets at the time they make their reservations. It will be different from what we have at Port Townsend right now.*

People get flat tires; things happen. How will they know for sure how they will get there?

*It will be a flexible enough system that you will be able to move your reservation around if something comes up.*

11. So there will be some penalty for no-shows?

Yes.

Good.

12. What happens if Kingston is booked for the whole day, will they be able to tell us if we can get on Bremerton or Southworth?

*That issue has come up quite a bit. In order to help people find alternatives and know the status of the other routes, real-time communication is essential. We don't have a system in place now that delivers that, but that will be a big part of this. We're discussing the use of variable message signage and where to place it in order to help people get the information they need to make a decision.*

### **Preparing for the 2010 Legislative Session**

WSDOT Assistant Secretary David H. Moseley

David discussed the upcoming 2010 Legislative session. As you know WSF was front and center during the 2009 Legislative session, with Plan B in the spotlight. We don't anticipate that same attention in the 2010 session. There are some important things they have asked to see; the reservations pre-design study is one of those. Also they want to see a new accident and incident investigation policy, fuel conservation targets, and information regarding a fuel surcharge in case gas prices spike again. Those are some issues that will be discussed; these are reports on things that the Legislature has asked us to look at, but they are not hot-button issues like the Long-Range Plan last year and the vessel and terminal issues. The JTC (Joint Transportation Committee) is doing a study on alternative funding options for transportation, because the gas tax is dropping as cars become more fuel efficient. In 2016 there is a one billion dollar gap in funding for the ferry system, and we need to fill that gap. That discussion will be occurring more in the 2011 session, but we need to be ready and at the table for those discussions. If there is a comprehensive transportation package for the Legislature to consider we need to be a part of it.

### **Clarifying Questions from Audience**

1. I've heard conflicting things from different Legislators about this: does the build in Washington law preclude you from being able to use federal funds to build the ferries?

*We can and have used federal funds to purchase owner-furnished equipment for the ferries such as the engines and the propulsion systems. That said, federal funds cannot be used for construction of the boats.*

### **Public Comments & Questions**

1. On the issue of funding, I read an article on a study of the nations' shipyards, and it seems a number of those employees reverse commute. Maybe you can get some national security funding for helping out with that. The runs go both ways.

*There are Navy installations all over Puget Sound that we provide transportation for. The idea of getting a subsidy from the military has been tossed around, but nothing has come of it.*

2. If there is a natural disaster WSF will save people. When the bridges are down the ferries will be called in to provide transportation around the sound. Think of what would have happened on the Hudson River; without the ferries those people would have died. WSF is very important.

### **Conclusion**

David thanked everyone for coming. Meeting was adjourned.

### **Written Comments (Transcribed)**

- (H. Dean Ferguson) I think the ferry system should use the tourist attraction angle to generate revenue.
- (Jack Arends)
  - Wifi aboard the ferries has made my commuting time much more productive. Thanks for doing that.
  - Some arrangement should be reached so that Orca cards are available for sale at the downtown Seattle ferry terminal. (I tried to buy one and was told I'd have to go to the Westlake bus tunnel station.)
- (Anonymous)
  - Love the midday schedule run.
  - Can we have the 10:30 pm boat from Seattle moved back to 10:45 pm when the baseball season starts?
  - Need to have other communities sacrifice a boat when the Bainbridge or Kingston routes go down. How about one from the San Juan Islands?